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THE ELOHIST NARRATIVE IN EXODUS 3:1-15

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The third chapter of Exodus is interesting for many reasons, in general because of its far-reaching historical significance, and in particular because it contains the account of the theophany in the so-called "burning" bush and of the revelation of the supposedly divine name, *־ehyeh* *־asher* *־ehyeh*, which have furnished so much occasion for speculation and critical acumen.

The chapter has been recognized by all biblical scholars as composite. Thus, verse 9 manifestly repeats the thought of verse 7. Moreover, the inconsequential use of both יְהוָה and אֱלֹהִים for the deity, and particularly the sudden transition from one to the other, as, for example, in verse 4, as well as the easily recognized presence of other significant characteristics of the two sources, indicate that the chapter contains elements drawn from both the Elohist and Yahwist documents. Upon this practically all scholars are agreed.

But there is by no means absolute unanimity of opinion in the analysis of the chapter into its component sources, as the following table of analyses (p. 243), made by various biblical scholars since the appearance of Holzinger's tables,¹ will show. This table indicates that Bacon inaugurated a more detailed and searching analysis of the chapter than had been made previously and that the majority of scholars since have followed him in his main conclusions. It may be remarked in passing that of all these scholars, Harford alone assigns verse 15 to the main Elohist narrative and verse 14 to some other source. Likewise all these scholars, with the exception of Addis and Driver, whose analyses, however, are, as can be seen, very vague, assign verse 5 to J.

¹ *Einleitung in den Hexateuch* (1893), Appendix, 6, where the analyses of Dillmann, Kittel, Wellhausen, Kuenen, Jülicher, Cornill, and Driver, and preliminary analyses of Eduard Meyer and Bacon are given in tabular form.

Name	E	J	R
Addis*	1-3; 4b-6; 9-15	4a; 7-8	
Bacon†	1; † 4b; † 6; 9-14	2-4a; 5; 7-8	RD 8b; 15
Kautzsch‡	13-14	1-12 JE	15
Driver	1-6; 9-15	7-8	
Holzinger¶	1; 4b; 6a; 9-12a; 13-14; 15b	2-4a; 5; 6b-7	RJE 8; 12b; 15a
Harford**	1; 4b; 6; 9b-13; 15	2-4a; 5; 7-9a; 14	14 (traces of RJE)
Baentsch††	1; † 4b; † 6; 9-14	2-4a; 5; 7-8a	RJE 8b; R 15
Procksch‡‡	1; 2b; (3b-4a †); 4b; 6-14	2a; 2b; 3a; 5; 7-8a	
Meyer§§	1; † 4b; † 6; 9-14	2-4a; 5; 7-8‡	
Gressmann	1; 4b; 6; 9-14	2-4a; 5; 7-8	6a

* *The Documents of the Hexateuch* (1892).

† *The Triple Tradition of the Exodus* (1894).

‡ Meyer and Gressmann regard v. 15 as the work of E2, and Gressmann regards vv. 9-13 as also the work of E2. Bacon, Baentsch, and Meyer regard כֹּהן מָדִין in v. 1 and מָתְרֵךְ הַסְנָה in v. 4b as redatorial, while in addition Meyer would emend of v. 8 to וְאֶלְךָ רֹאשֵׁךְ or וְאֶלְךָ רֹאשֵׁת.

§ *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments* (1896).

|| *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (1898).

¶ *Exodus*, in Marti's "Handkommentar" series (1900).

** In Carpenter and Harford, *Introduction to the Hexateuch* (1902).

†† *Exodus*, in Nowack's "Handkommentar" series (1903).

‡‡ *Das nordhebräische Sagenbuch—Die Elohimquelle* (1906).

§§ *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme* (1906).

||| *Mose und seine Zeit* (1913)..

Speaking for the present in a general way, we may unhesitatingly follow Bacon and his successors in assigning to the Elohist source verses 1; 4b; 6; 9-15. These verses exhibit numerous characteristic indications of Elohistic authorship, such as the consistent use of אלהים for the deity; the designation of the father-in-law of Moses by the name of Jethro, whereas the Yahwist document calls him Reuel (2:18); the use of the name Horeb for the holy mountain, the double משֶׁה בֶּשֶׁת in 4b; the motive of Moses hiding his face out of fear of looking upon the deity;¹ and the motive of the revelation for the first time of the divine name, Yahwe, to Moses on this occasion, whereas, according to J, the name Yahwe was known already to Abraham (Gen. 12:8) or even from the days of Sheth (Gen. 4:26).

On the other hand, verses 7 and 8 and also 16-22 with equal certainty belong to the Yahwist source. Characteristic thereof is the statement of verse 8 that Yahwe has come down to deliver

¹ Cf. my "Biblical Theophanies" in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XXV (1912), 168, and contrast the Yahwist statement that Yahwe actually appeared to Moses, 3:2, 16; 4:1, 5, and also the characteristic Yahwist motive that Moses could behold and speak to Yahwe face to face (Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8).

Israel, with its implication that normally Yahwe dwells in heaven, or at least in some place on high (cf. Gen. 11:5; Exod. 19:18; 34:5), and also the description of the land of Canaan as "a land flowing with milk and honey,"¹ and the reference to the pre-Israelite nations of Palestine.² This same description of the land is repeated in verse 17, while in verses 16–22 we note the characteristic Yahwist motive that Moses could behold and speak to Yahwe face to face (cf. Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8); the reference to the elders as the leaders of the people; the designation of Yahwe as the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;³ the reference in verse 18 to the three days' journey into the wilderness (cf. Exod 5:3; 8:23); and likewise the motive of the despoiling of the Egyptians in verses 21 ff. (cf. Exod. 11:2; 12:35 f.).

Actually verses 16–22 merely forecast the Yahwist account of the future course of events in Egypt, and are rather bound up with the continuation of the narrative than an integral part of the account of the theophany itself. This is contained in verses 1–15. And in this narrative a moment's consideration shows that the basis of the account of the theophany is furnished by the Elohist, while the Yahwist has supplied only the secondary, amplificatory, and, in verses 7–8, duplicative material.

Our first task, therefore, is to analyze verses 1–6 and separate the secondary Yahwistic matter from the primary Elohistic. That there is Yahwistic matter in these verses is proved by the sudden and violent transition from *Yahwe* to *Elohim* in verse 4. Certainly 4a belongs to J, and 4b, as said above, to E. Furthermore, 4a implies that something unusual, and even extraordinary, is to be seen, which

¹ Cf. Carpenter and Harford, *op. cit.*, p. 386, No. 34.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 197.

³ Only J could speak logically of Yahwe as the God of the Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, since according to him alone Yahwe was truly and completely known by them under his right name. Since the Elohist represents this name, and therefore the true and full nature of Yahwe, according to fundamental Semitic religious conceptions, as being revealed to Moses, and through Moses to Israel, only now, he could scarcely have conceived of Yahwe as being in the full sense of the word the God of their ancestors, and have spoken of him as such. Moreover, as we shall see, the sequel of the Elohist tradition here is found in Exodus, chapters 18 ff., and implies that when Israel came to this mountain, as was foretold in v. 12 of this chapter, it entered into a covenant with Yahwe; in other words, according to the Elohist, the true and complete worship of Yahwe by Israel began only with Moses' and Israel's advent at Horeb. For this reason, too, the Elohist could hardly have called Yahwe the God of their fathers.

impels Moses to turn aside. What that is, is stated in 2b and 3. It is not merely the theophany of the deity in the bush, but rather the fact that the bush burns without being consumed. Certainly this is something sufficiently abnormal to warrant turning aside for further examination. Accordingly 4a implies as its necessary precedent 2b and 3, while 2b in turn implies 2a. Verses 2-4a then clearly belong to J, as is indicated also by the reference to the מלְאָךְ יְהוָה in 2a.

Verse 4b then would be the direct continuation in the Elohist narrative of verse 1. And it is significant that not only is this connection most apposite, but also that the passage becomes fully intelligible only when verses 2-4a are eliminated from the basic Elohist narrative. The Yahwist insertion, verses 2-4a, coupled with the statement of verse 8, implies that the *mal'ak Yahwe*, or, as the original must have had it, Yahwe himself, had descended from his abode on high, in the form of a fiery apparition characteristic of J,¹ here specifically stated to be a **לִבְנָה אֵשׁ**, a flame of fire, and momentarily entered into the bush only for this one particular theophany; but it does not in the least imply a constant and physical contact or relationship between Yahwe and this bush, that, in other words, Yahwe dwelt permanently in this bush, and that the bush was therefore constantly enveloped in fire, and yet not consumed.

Just the opposite is implied in the Elohist narrative. In the first place, this is not just *a* bush, any bush at all, that happened to be growing on the top of the mountain, but is in every case **הַכֶּנֶת**, "the bush," invariably with the article. The question immediately arises: "Why the article; what particular bush is this?" And the answer is promptly furnished by the expression **שְׁכִינָה סְנָה**, "the dweller in the bush," applied to Yahwe in Deut. 33:16, likewise, in all probability, just as the Elohist Code, the product of the Northern Kingdom, and therefore reflecting in all likelihood a northern conception of the original abode of Yahwe. There, it is true, **סְנָה** is used without the article. But it is clear that the expression does not mean that Yahwe dwells in any bush, or in any **סְנָה**, whatever it may have actually been, but in some particular **סְנָה**; that, in other

¹ Cf. my "Biblical Theophanies," *loc. cit.*, pp. 153-58.

words, **שָׁנָה** is here used as a proper name, equivalent to the **הַשָּׁנָה** with the article in Exodus, chapter 3.

From this it becomes clear that the Elohist author of the main narrative of Exodus, chapter 3, conceived of Yahwe as dwelling permanently in the bush, **שָׁנָה**, just as is implied in the expression **שְׁכִינָה** of Deut. 33:16. His connection with this bush is not casual and temporary, as the J writer conceived of it, but is normal and constant. He dwells in this bush permanently, and there he may always be found. Hence the article, **הַשָּׁנָה**, "the bush," the particular bush which is always distinguished by the presence of Yahwe in it; hence also the otherwise altogether meaningless and incomprehensible designation of this mountain upon which the bush stands, and upon which, therefore, Yahwe dwells, as the **הַר הָאֱלֹהִים קָדֵשׁ**, "the mountain of God"; and hence, also, the fact that the ground immediately surrounding the bush is **אֲדָמִית קָדֵשׁ**, "holy" or "taboo ground," rendered so by the, not accidental and temporary, but constant, presence of Yahwe in its midst; therefore it must not be trodden with impunity or with shod feet. The prescribed ritual manner of approach to this sacred spot is with bare feet. The J motive of the chance and momentary presence of Yahwe in this bush would not account at all for the inviolate character of this spot, or, at least, it would not account for it nearly as well or as logically as does the E tradition of the constant and permanent residence of Yahwe in this place. This is, to use the ancient Arabic term, a *ḥima*, a spot sanctified by the residence of a deity within it.¹

Accordingly it becomes clear that the original Elohist tradition knew nothing at all of the theophany in the *burning* bush. The "burning" element of this composite tradition comes from J alone,

¹ Cf. Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*², pp. 156 f. The peculiar, fragmentary legend recorded in Josh. 5:13-15 is undoubtedly closely related to this passage in Exodus 3. Practically all scholars are agreed that the present literary form of that passage is quite late, and is directly dependent upon Exod. 3:5. Because of the almost total absence of characteristic indications the great majority of the scholars refrain from any attempt to determine whether the passage is specifically from J or E, and content themselves with calling it JE. Holzinger (*Joshua*, p. 12) concludes, rather hesitatingly, however, that it is J, while Steuernagel (*Joshua*, p. 169) infers with equal hesitation that the passage comes from E. Kittel asserts far more positively that this passage is the work of E (*Geschichte Israels*¹, I, 255). However, in view of the obvious and universally conceded dependence and lateness of the present literary form of the legend, the decision as to whether it comes from J or E can be of little or no significance for the solution of the problem of the authorship of Exod. 3:5.

and is altogether secondary. The original Elohist tradition told simply and naturally that Moses, herding the sheep of his father-in-law, comes purely by chance to a mountain on the western edge of the wilderness (**אֶנְדָּר דָּבָר**). There, suddenly and entirely unexpectedly, he hears a strange voice speaking to him from a bush upon the mountain, into the vicinity of which he had involuntarily strayed, and from the words uttered and the charge conveyed, he realizes that he has come into a *hima*, or sacred spot, and that in this bush a certain deity is dwelling; for this reason the ground around the bush is holy. Such was the simple and natural content of the original Elohist narrative. Accordingly verse 5, contrary to the opinion of all biblical scholars hitherto, must be unhesitatingly assigned to E.

But what deity was this? Certainly the story implies that previous to this he was entirely unknown to Moses. Who could he have been? Verse 6 in its present form states that he is the God of Moses' father,¹ the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. This representation is surprising and incongruous and manifestly not original. For, on the one hand, unless we emend the singular **אֵבֶן** to the plural **אֲבָתִים**, we cannot regard the term **אֱלֹהִי אֲבָרָהָם אֱלֹהִי אֲבָנִים** as synonymous and appositional with **יִצְחָק וַיַּעֲקֹב** as is the **אֱלֹהִי אֲבָרָהָם** of verse 15 and of 4:5. This emendation would not be impossible nor even unnatural, since it would necessitate the insertion of but one single letter, one which might easily have fallen out of the original. But in such case it would follow that the whole of 6a is a J insertion, and this is improbable. For, to be complete, the E narrative must have contained the motive of the deity's telling Moses who he was, and just this is implied by the continuation of the narrative in 6b. Moses, suddenly made to realize through the words spoken to him that he is standing in the presence of a god, hides his face, for he does not dare look upon the face of a god. Obviously in the original E narrative the very first words of the deity to Moses had given a clear intimation of the divine source of the voice speaking from the bush.

But on the other hand, from the standpoint of the original E narrative, as we have seen it must have run, this deity with whom Moses now becomes acquainted for the first time could not be

¹ Note the singular **אֵבֶן** instead of the plural **אֲבָתִים**, which was to be expected.

spoken of logically as the God of Moses' father, and therefore still less as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Manifestly the original narrative, with its picture of the mountain of God, its *hima* or sacred territory, and its deity dwelling in the bush in the center of this *hima*, presents a conception of a local deity as pronounced and unmistakable as any in the Bible, or, for that matter, anywhere else in Semitic literature. This is a local deity pure and simple. He dwells in the bush upon this sacred mountain, and his power and authority radiate from there over a certain circle of territory. This mountain is located in the land of Midian,¹ upon the western edge of the desert. With this spot, and therefore with this local deity, neither Moses' father nor yet the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had ever come into contact. Consequently, for this reason, too, as well as that stated above, the original E narrative could scarcely have designated this deity as the God of the patriarchs nor yet as the God of Moses' father.

How then did it specify him? The answer to this question is probably not far to seek. The expression אֱלֹהִים אֶלְךָ יְהוָה וְאֶלְךָ יְהָקֵב we must, as has been stated, regard as Yahwistic. Since, according to J, the patriarchs knew Yahwe completely and worshiped him under his own name, Yahwist writers could speak consistently of Yahwe as the God of the patriarchs. The expression here is undoubtedly secondary, the work of the Yahwist editor. But how is it with אֶבְיךָ? The use of the singular here is striking. As has been said, the change to the plural will not fit the context, since the original narrative must have had here some simple statement, telling who this deity was; and the emendation to אֶבְתֵּיךָ, and construing this then as in apposition with what follows, would preclude the possibility of any such statement. Yet a moment's thought will show that the use of the singular here cannot be accidental, but must be purposed and significant. In all likelihood the original read, not אֶבְיךָ, but חַתְנֶךָ, not "thy father," but "thy father-in-law."

The Yahwist narrative states very explicitly that the father-in-law of Moses was the כֹּהֵן מִדּין (Exod. 2:16). The same expression is used in 3:1 in such a manner that we might, with a number of

¹ At least so the J narrative says (Exod. 2:15), and in this E seems to agree (cf. the discussion below of כֹּהֵן מִדּין).

eminent scholars, regard it as a harmonistic, redatorial insertion, the work of a Yahwist editor. But far more probably the Elohist author, as well as the Yahwist, knew of the father-in-law of Moses as being a priest, and presumably, therefore, "the priest of Midian." As has been already intimated and as will be shown more conclusively later, Exodus, chapters 18 ff., furnish the sequel to this Elohist narrative begun in Exodus, chapter 3. There (v. 1) also Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, is called "the priest of Midian." Moreover, as 18:8-10 implies, Yahwe, the deity of this mountain, is from of old well known to Jethro. He and his tribe have, presumably, worshiped Yahwe as a desert deity for many generations. And now, when he learns from the lips of his son-in-law, with whose mission to Egypt at the command of this deity, he must have been perfectly acquainted, how Yahwe has prospered this mission, and, although far from his home upon this mountain, Yahwe has proved himself more than a mere local, desert deity, and has shown himself mightier than even the gods of the Egyptians, Jethro is filled with joy and pride, and in this new-found and incontrovertible evidence of the superiority of his deity to all other deities he exclaims: "Now I know that Yahwe is greater than all other gods." It is not the exclamation of a recent and enthusiastic convert to a new and hitherto unknown faith, but the proud and gratified utterance of an old and loyal devotee of this deity, who had unfailingly believed in the power of this deity, and regarded, or at least suspected, him as being something more than an ordinary desert god, and who now rejoices to find this faith confirmed completely and convincingly. These verses picture Jethro unmistakably as the original worshiper of Yahwe, and indicate that the meaning of the tradition in Exodus, chapter 3, is not that Moses was the first discoverer of this deity, but merely that this deity, worshiped from of old by Jethro and his tribe, now for the first time reveals himself in person, as it were, to Moses, the stranger and the representative of a strange people, and indicates thereby his willingness to become the deity and protector of this people and his choice of Moses to be the leader of this people and his representative, mediator, priest, and oracle-interpreter to this people. But naturally on this occasion when the people itself, through its elders, is for the first time brought into contact

with Yahwe here at his mountain, it is Jethro, his old worshiper and priest, who acts as master of ceremonies, presides over the sacrifice and ensuing meal, and initiates them thereby into covenant relationship with Yahwe.

Even more significant, on the very next day he advises and impliedly instructs Moses, obviously appointed, as has been said, by Yahwe to be his oracular priest for this new and larger body of worshipers, as to the technical procedure in regard to the consultation of the oracle of Yahwe. Just this last was the primary function of the **כֹהן** of a nomadic tribe, such as that into which Moses had married as represented in all sources. All this evidence can indicate only that the Elohist narrative, similar to the Yahwist, regarded Moses' father-in-law as being a priest, and, in all probability, "the priest of Midian," and furthermore as being in particular the oracular priest or **כֹהן בּוֹרֶה** or **כֹהן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** (cf. II Chron. 15:3) of just the deity of this mountain.¹ From all this we may safely conclude, not only that verse 6 in Exod. 3:1 is original and not redactorial, but also that verse 6 originally read simply and directly **אֱלֹהִים אֲלֹהֵי הַתְּנִינָה**. For this **הַתְּנִינָה**, to which later national tradition—particularly when interpreted from the Yahwist assumption that Yahwe had been worshiped already by the patriarchs, and which likewise scarcely regarded the tribe of Moses' father-in-law as being in the truest sense an integral part of Israel or one of the thirteen original tribes—naturally took exception, some later Yahwist editor substituted **אֲבִיךָ**, the minimum change that could be conceived of, implying thereby that this was the god of Moses' father rather than of his father-in-law, and retaining very naturally the singular **אֲבִיךָ** for the original singular **הַתְּנִינָה**. And a still later Yahwist editor inserted, in conformity with Yahwist tradition, **אֲלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֲלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב**, without, however, troubling himself to harmonize the resultant text by emending the singular **אֲבִיךָ** to the plural **אֲבָתִיךָ**.

The next matter of significance in the Elohist portion of Exodus, chapter 3, is the statement in verse 9 that God says that the cry of the children of Israel has come to him. This is not coupled with

¹ This, too, is the picture which the Kenite document in Exod. 33:14 and Num. 10:29-32 gives of Hobab, the **חָתָן** of Moses. In this older document, however, **חָתָן** is used in its older and more original meaning of "brother-in-law." The arguments which lead to this conclusion must be reserved for presentation elsewhere.

the expression **עֲבָדִים** and the consequent statement that the children of Israel were already his people, as is the case in the parallel Yahwist statement in verse 7. Similarly, the word **עֲבָדִים** is conspicuously absent in verses 11, 13, and 15, likewise, as we have seen, the work of the Elohist. The significance of this fact is plain. For just the same reason that the Yahwist document could speak of Yahwe as the god of the patriarchs, it could also speak of Israel as Yahwe's people. It had already told of the covenant entered into between Yahwe and the patriarchs, and that this covenant was to descend to their posterity (Gen. 12:2 f., 7; 13:14 ff.; 15:18; 28:13-15). But the Elohist had, as yet, recorded no such incident. According to him the relations of the deity to the patriarchs were not only incomplete in that Yahwe's true name had not yet been revealed to them, but likewise they were altogether personal and individual. In the original Elohist document thus far there has not been the slightest intimation of a covenant between Yahwe on the one hand and the patriarchs and their descendants on the other.¹ Nor could there have been; for a covenant implies perfect and unqualified relations and agreement without the slightest reservation on either side, such as the withholding from the patriarchs of the true name of the deity would have implied. In other words, the Elohist could not have told of a covenant between God and the patriarchs and Israel before this moment, and, per contra, the revelation of the divine name now is clearly preparatory to, or rather the first step in the process of, establishing a covenant between God and Israel. For this reason the Yahwist document, on the one hand, could speak very consistently of Israel as Yahwe's people, while the Elohist document could not yet do so. Therefore, in verses 9, 11, 13, and 15 the Elohist writer speaks consistently of the **בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** alone, without designating them yet as Yahwe's people. For this reason in verse 10 must be regarded as a redactional insertion of the Yahwist editor.²

Verse 12 has puzzled many commentators. They have asked, and seemingly with justification, What kind of sign is this which

¹ For the analysis of Genesis 15, with its record of God's promise to Abraham, and the comparatively late date of its composition, cf. Gunkel and Skinner to the passage.

² Similarly LXX reads *τὸν λαὸν μου = עֲבָדִים* in v. 12 where M.T. reads more correctly **הַשְׁבָּט**.

Yahwe now gives to Moses, viz., that after the people shall have come forth from Egypt, they shall worship him at this mountain? They have argued that 12b does not fit in with the thought of 12a; what Moses requires is not such a remote sign as this, the fulfilment of which will not be until long after the event has transpired for the consummation of which Moses' faith must be strengthened. Instead, Moses now requires a sign, they argue, the truth and significance of which he can perceive immediately, and which will at once establish his conviction that this deity is sufficiently powerful to fulfil the word which he has just spoken. And so they would take certain liberties with this verse, either emend 12b radically, or transpose it to some other position.

The second half of the verse says that when Israel shall have come forth from Egypt, it will worship this deity at this mountain. Inasmuch, as we have seen, as Moses himself was not previously acquainted with this deity, it follows that the Israelites in Egypt likewise could not have been previously acquainted with him. Therefore the worship here referred to must be the very first worship of this deity by this people. But according to primitive Semitic religious conceptions,¹ amply attested by biblical evidence, the worship of a deity by a tribe or people implies a covenant relation between that deity and that people. A people could not worship an unrelated deity, nor, for that matter, could it worship any deity in any way other than that of his regular, prescribed ritual. Consequently this statement here by this deity can mean only one thing, viz., that thereby he expresses his willingness, and even his determination, to enter into a covenant relation with this people whom he will have delivered; he will accept their worship, and will in turn protect and prosper them further. Moses is not only to bring them out of Egypt, but he is also to bring them directly to this mountain, in order that the covenant may be solemnized and that they may thereupon enjoy the privilege of worshiping him. For this reason Moses need have no fear, as, according to verse 11, he seems to have, that he must upon this mission rely upon his own, unaided efforts alone to accomplish the arduous task of going before Pharaoh and bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt. The deity promises

¹Cf. Roberston Smith, *Religion of the Semites*², pp. 269 ff.

Moses his aid; he assures him that he is not to go as a mere, ordinary, weak human being, but with his divine support; that it is he who is sending him. And the sign and proof that this deity has indeed sent Moses will be his constant presence with Moses and the repeated manifestations of his power, protection, and support. And in addition, and probably as confirmation and seal of this promise, comes the assurance that Moses shall bring the redeemed Israel to this mountain, and there a covenant shall be solemnized between this deity and this people; if then the deity should have failed or fallen short in any of his promises to Moses, Moses, upon his return to this mountain with the people, will be able to hold the deity responsible. Surely this is sufficient assurance and confirmation of his word, a sufficient indication to Moses that he is going not alone and unaided, but that indeed a deity, and in particular this deity, has sent him.¹

As we have said, the revelation of the divine name is undoubtedly preparatory to, and actually the first step in, the complicated process of establishing a covenant between Yahwe and Israel. The sequel to this tradition here is found in Exodus, chapters 18-20. There we have the declaration of the deity for the second time of who he is and what his true name is (20:2), followed by a statement of the

¹ That something like this interpretation must have been in the minds of the Massorites may be inferred from the fact that they placed only a *zagef* over יְהֹוָה instead of the full stop *segolta*. This seems to imply that they interpreted 12a to mean, "Verily, I shall be with thee; and this fact [of Yahwe's being constantly with Moses] shall be the sign that I have sent thee." The majority of medieval Jewish commentators from Rashi on interpreted יְהֹוָה as referring to the miracle of the bush burning without being consumed as being proof of Yahwe's power and therefore the sign that Yahwe had sent Moses and could protect him. While this is clearly, in the light of our analysis of this chapter, not the original meaning of this passage, it shows nevertheless that these medieval commentators agreed with the Massorites in interpreting, not 12b, but rather 12a as being the sign given to Moses. These same commentators interpreted 12b as being, not the conclusion of יְהֹוָה לְךָ דָבָר, but rather as being the answer to Moses' second question to the deity in 11b, "How shall I bring Israel out from Egypt?" The answer is: "By telling them and Pharaoh that they must go forth in order to worship this deity at this mountain." And actually just this is the message that Moses brings to Israel and to Pharaoh, that they must go forth from Egypt to celebrate a festival to Yahwe in the wilderness. In the present composite form of the narrative this is represented as only a pretext to deceive Pharaoh and induce him to let Israel go; and Pharaoh suspects this (10:10). But, as Eduard Meyer has shown conclusively (*Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme*, pp. 32-42), the original narrative must have told in detail of the exodus of Israel from Egypt primarily in order to celebrate just this festival to Yahwe, of course at the sacred mountain where he was thought to dwell, and of the actual celebration of this festival upon its advent there. Just this is what 3:12b implies; it is clear, therefore, that it accords fully with the details of the original narrative. Not improbably, therefore, 12b was originally introduced by a ה connective, וּבְהַר צִיָּאָן.

fundamental principles of his worship, couched in the traditional form of ten laws, which Israel is to observe punctiliously (20:3-17). We have likewise in Exodus, chapter 18, as we have seen, the account of the solemn meal, eaten in the presence of the deity by Jethro, Aaron, and the elders of Israel, as the representatives of the people, by which unmistakably the covenant between the deity and Israel is ratified. We have also the initiation of Moses by Jethro, the priest of this deity, in the technique of the oracle of this deity, and the institution of a judicial system by which the laws emanating from this deity through his oracle can be administered and the life which he has ordained be controlled. And finally, we have in Exod. 23:20 ff. the promise that this deity will send his מלָאך to lead the people onward from this mountain to the place which he has appointed for them. Moses had been able to lead the people from Egypt to this mountain, because he had been over the ground twice before, viz., on his first flight from Egypt and again on his return thither. But from the mountain onward the country was entirely unknown to him, and he was therefore unable to lead the people farther; hence the necessity of another guide.¹

It is clear that the Elohist account of the solemnization of the covenant between Yahwe and Israel is full and complete in practically every detail. And it is equally clear that in the record of the preliminary conversation between the deity and Moses, as recorded in Exodus, chapter 3, the story would be incomplete and inartistically told without some reference to the covenant that is to follow, with its implication that this deity is acting, not whimsically and inconsequentially, but deliberately and with full realization of his ultimate purpose of taking this people to be his worshipers, and the means of its fulfilment. On the ground of this cumulative evidence we must conclude, contrary to the opinion of many biblical scholars, that the reference in 12b to the future covenant is not only essential to the complete narrative, but also that it is altogether in its proper position here, and that it cannot be logically transposed to any better place in the Elohist narrative. And the meaning of the verse must be that which we have offered above.

¹Exod. 14:19, which speaks of the מלָאך אֱלֹהִים leading Israel already before it came to the Red Sea, is of course the work of E2.

In verse 13, for the same reason that we have emended **אֱלֹהִים** of verse 6 to **הָתֹךְ**, so here **אֱבֹהִים** must be regarded as the work of the Yahwist redactor, substituted for the original **הָתֹךְ**.¹ Certainly, again, the idea of “the God of their fathers” is incompatible with the thought that the people do not know the name of this deity whom their fathers, supposedly, had worshiped, and whom, presumably, they too should have been worshiping all these years. This very ignorance of the name of the deity implies, of course, that there could have been neither acquaintance with, nor worship of, him on the part of Israel.

Verses 14 and 15 present a difficult problem, yet one which, in view of its difficulty, has been answered, incorrectly we believe, by biblical scholars with surprising unanimity. In verse 13 Moses has put to the deity the question as to his name. Verses 14 and 15 offer the answer to this question. The difficulty is that the answer is double. Verse 15 furnishes an answer to the question of 13 as complete and logical as that of 14. And the difficulty is heightened by the fact that the two answers do not agree. For 14 states explicitly that the name of the deity is *Ehyeh*, while 15 states just as explicitly that the name is *Yahwe*. Which is original, and, after determining this, how shall we account for the second answer?

With surprising unanimity, as has been said, scholars have agreed that 14 is the original.² The reasons for this conclusion, so far as we have been able to determine, have never been clearly and adequately stated. In fact it would seem that the natural inclination to discover a satisfactory interpretation of the difficult *Ehyeh 'asher Ehyeh* of 14b, with the supposed significance of this name *Ehyeh* for the determination of the original conception of *Yahwe*, has caused most scholars completely to overlook the fact that 15 offers a second answer to the question, and to assume, without argument, that 14 is the only and original answer.

As Marti has correctly pointed out,³ the name of the deity given in 14 is not *Ehyeh 'asher Ehyeh*, but only *Ehyeh* alone. Verse 14b states explicitly that when Moses comes to the children of Israel,

¹ Unless the original read simply **אֱלֹהִים**, “a deity.”

² As the tables show, Harford alone, apparently, of all the critics regards 15 as the original and 14 as secondary.

³ *Geschichte der israelitischen Religion*, pp. 72 f.

and they ask who has sent him, he is to answer, “²*Ehyeh* has sent me unto you.” We must, therefore, interpret ²*Ehyeh* ³*šer* ²*Ehyeh*, not in the usual, meaningless manner, “I am that I am,” but, with Marti, “²*Ehyeh*, that is, I am”; in other words, the verse implies that the proper name of the deity, ²*Ehyeh*, not only specifies him as an individual, but also sets forth his fundamental attribute as “The one who is,” presumably, therefore as “The eternally existent one.”¹

But it is significant that the actual name of the deity, elsewhere than in this one verse, is never ²*Ehyeh*, but always *Yahwe*. This is his true name, even to the Elohist author, as Exod. 20:2 clearly shows. But inasmuch, as we have maintained, as these verses here are but the introduction to the Elohist account of the covenant on Horeb, and such a covenant between a deity and a people requires a full knowledge of that deity by that people, in order that they may worship him completely and direct their sacrifices and prayers to him alone, and such full knowledge requires among other things acquaintance with the true name of that deity and not merely a descriptive epithet or attribute, it follows that the main Elohist narrative could never have told that the name of this deity was ²*Ehyeh* but must have told simply and directly that his name was *Yahwe*.² This is proved, as has been said, by the cognate narrative in Exod. 20:2, the formal statement of the deity to the people as a whole, that his name is *Yahwe*, preliminary to the communication to them of the ten fundamental laws of his worship and life; he is *Yahwe*, their God, who has, just as he has here promised Moses, brought them out of Egypt. Accordingly, contrary to the opinion of almost all biblical scholars, we must regard verse 14 as secondary, and verse 15 as the original, the direct answer to Moses’ question in verse 13.

¹ So undoubtedly LXX, in rendering ²*Ehyeh* δωρ, “The existent one.”

² This thought disposes of the altogether groundless hypothesis of Eduard Meyer (*Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme*, p. 6) that in answer to Moses’ request *Yahwe* pretends to reveal to him his true name, but actually avoids doing so by communicating a name which sounds something like his true name, and which also discloses something of his true nature; but Moses is clever enough to see through the deceit and to infer from the wrong name ²*Ehyeh* that the true name is *Yahwe*. This hypothesis is ingenious indeed, but altogether fanciful, and has been very properly rejected by Gressmann (*Mose und seine Zeit*, p. 35), who, however, seems to propose an interpretation which differs but little from that of Meyer in meaning and groundlessness.

In verse 15, therefore, **וְאֵלֹהִים** and, as we have already seen, **וְאֵלֹהִים** must be redactional, the work of the Yahwist editor. Or, more likely, **וְאֵלֹהִים** was inserted by the same Elohist theologian who inserted verse 14 into the main narrative. For verse 14 is certainly Elohistic, as the use of **אֱלֹהִים** and the omission of **בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** before **צַדְקָה** show. The conception of a deity who is designated by such a title as **‘Ehyeh**, setting forth what is obviously conceived as a fundamental attribute of his, is certainly anything but primitive. Nor is the conception of a deity as “The one who is” or “The eternally existent one” at all primitive, even despite the opinion of such an eminent scholar as Kautzsch.¹ The primitive mind may conceive of eternity and immortality in a negative sense, as the opposite of dying, i.e., living forever, but it hardly conceives of this as a fundamental and distinctive attribute of any one deity. Primitive man does not ask what a deity is, but only what he can do. When we find deities described and individualized by their attributes, and particularly by such abstract concepts as “The one who is,” we may be sure that we have entered the realm of theological speculation. Just this is the case with the thought of verse 14. It can be only the product of speculative theologizing as to the nature of Israel’s God in circles which, probably even after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, were directly influenced by Elohistic thought and literature, in other words, E2. Not improbably the name **‘Ehyeh** was suggested by the use of this word in verse 12; in other words, the theological authors of verse 14 probably interpreted verse 12 to mean “But **‘Ehyeh** is with thee,” etc. With this as their starting-point, they developed their thought of **‘Ehyeh** as the name or designation of the deity.

One fact of importance, however, this verse does bring home. It is, of course, the very first attempt in human history to interpret the name Yahwe etymologically, and from this determine his true nature. And it is significant that these early theologians, living probably close to the end of the eighth century B.C., regarded the name Yahwe as coming from the stem **הָיוֹת**, “to be,” and not from

¹ “Religion of Israel” in Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, V, 625b.

a, in the Semitic dialect of the Israelite tribes in the desert, supposititious **דָּהֹה**, "to fall," or from any other similar stem with any other similar meaning or implication. This fact should undoubtedly constitute the starting-point in any attempt today to determine the etymological significance of the name Yahwe, for certainly those theologians, even though they can hardly be termed primitive Israelites, were far closer to, and more appreciative of, that early age which first conceived of this deity and coined for him the name Yahwe, and also more appreciative of the spirit of their own native language than are we today. And when they tell us that the name Yahwe is derived from the stem **דָּהֹה**, "to be," that fact should carry much weight with us today. Apparently, too, they regarded **דָּהֹה** as in form a Qal rather than a Hif'il, since they equate it with the Qal form **אָדָה**.

The original Elohist narrative of Exodus, chapter 3, as we have reconstructed it, would accordingly read thus:

(1) וַיַּשְׁחַת דָּהֹה רֶעוּ אֲדָצָן יְהוָה חָתָנוּ כִּי מִדְיָן וַיַּהַג אֲתִידָצָן
 אחר המדבר ויבא אל-דור האלדים חרבה: (4) וירא אלין אלדים
 מותך הנסנה ויאמר משה משה ויאמר הנני: (5) ויאמר אל-חרב
 הלם של נעליך מעל רגליך כי המקום אשר אתה עמו עליך ארמנה
 קדש הוּא: (6) ויאמר אני אלדי [חתנק] ויסחר משה פניו כי רא
 מוהבית אל האלדים: (9) [ויאמר] עתה הנה צעקה בני ישראל
 באח אל וגו' ראיתי את הלהע אשר מצרים לחייביהם אוותם:
 (10) ועתה לך ואשליך אל-פרעה והוציא את-יבני ישראל ממצרים:
 (11) ויאמר משה אל-האלדים מי אני כי אלך אל פרעה וכי אוציא
 את-יבני ישראל ממצרים: (12) ויאמר כי אהיה עמי וזה-לך האה
 כי אני שלחיך [ובהוציאך] את העם תעבדון את-האלדים על הזה
 זהה: (13) ויאמר משה אל-האלדים הנה אני בא אל-בני ישראל
 ואמרתו להם אלדי [התני] שלחני אליכם ואמרו לי מודה-שם מה
 אמר אליהם: (15) ויאמר אלדים אל משה כי תאמיר אל-בני ישראל
 יהוה שלחני אליכם וודה-שמי לעולם וזה זכרי לדור דור:

Certainly nothing could be simpler, more direct, and more forceful than this.

It is true that this analysis of Exod. 3:1-15 differs in the main but little from the analyses of previous scholars. In fact it differs in only two essential points, viz., in the careful differentiation between the contents of the original E and J narratives of the theophany itself, as recounted in verses 1-6, and in the conclusion that verse 15 contains the original answer to the question of Moses in verse 13, and that verse 14 is secondary. But the consequences of these two conclusions for the reconstruction of the early history of Israel are far-reaching in both a positive and a negative sense.

In the negative sense this analysis and interpretation of verses 1-6, viz., that the original Elohist narrative told simply that Yahwe dwelt permanently in a bush upon this mountain, and that the entire motive of the bush burning with fire and yet not consumed is secondary, the insertion of a Yahwist reviser or editor, overthrows completely the fundamental premises of the hypothesis first put forward by Eduard Meyer¹ and later reaffirmed by Hugo Gressmann² that Yahwe was originally a fire- and volcano-god. They argue that the tradition of Yahwe dwelling in a burning bush, which burns constantly yet is not consumed, can be based only upon the natural phenomenon of a gaseous fire emerging from subterranean depths through a fissure in the earth's surface, and burning constantly in close proximity to a thorn bush, which is, however, not close enough to be consumed thereby. Moreover, Meyer would transfer the site of this strange phenomenon from the mountain, Horeb or Sinai, to Qadeš, according to him the scene of practically all the traditional events of any importance and historical probability attendant upon the exodus from Egypt and the wanderings in the desert. In this transfer, however, he is not followed by Gressmann, who realizes that the hypothesis that Yahwe was originally a volcano-god presupposes a cleft in the earth. Gressmann, accordingly, holds fast to the mountain, and refuses to transfer this one particular tradition to Qadeš.³

It is needless to discuss in detail this altogether fanciful and preposterous hypothesis to show the complete groundlessness of its various assumptions. It suffices, in order to disprove it absolutely,

¹ *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme*, pp. 70 f.

² *Mose und seine Zeit*, p. 168.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 24, n. 2.

to have shown, as we believe we have done, that the original Elohist version of this tradition, knew nothing at all of a *burning bush*, but spoke only of *the bush* upon the mountain in which Yahwe dwelt; therefore the mountain was called "the mountain of God" (v. 1), or, undoubtedly more correctly, in the earliest form of the tradition "the mountain of Yahwe" (Num. 10:33). The entire "burning" motive and the theophany in the flame of fire are secondary, the work of J, and accord completely with his characteristic theology of Yahwe's theophanies. But since this fire motive was not a part of the original tradition, the fundamental premise of the hypothesis of the fire- and volcano-god origin of Yahwe is refuted, and the hypothesis is shattered; Yahwe is, as it were, rescued from the flames.

And in a positive way, the implications of this analysis of the introductory portion of the Elohist account of the exodus from Egypt are even more significant. One thing has already become clear from this brief analysis, viz., that for the great majority of the details of their narrative the Elohist writers borrowed from older sources. Seemingly none of the details of the portion of the Elohist narrative contained in Exod. 3:1-15 is original, unless, perhaps, it be the localization of Yahwe in the bush upon the mountain, with the sacred territory or *hima* around it. Everything else, and perhaps even this also, has its antecedents in older tradition.

And it is significant that we meet many of these antecedents in the older K and C documents, as, for instance, Moses' marriage with a maiden of the Qenite tribe, the facts that his נָהָר¹ is the tribal priest and oracle-interpreter of the deity of his tribe, and that this deity is named Yahwe and dwells upon a mountain in the wilderness, which is therefore called **הר דָּאַלְדִּים**, "the mountain of God," or, more exactly, as we have seen, **הר יְהוָה**, "the mountain of Yahwe," and the command given to Moses by this deity to go down to Egypt and bring out the children of Israel (not yet the people of Yahwe) and lead them to this mountain, there to enter into a covenant with Yahwe upon the basis of a code of laws to be revealed when the people should have reached the mountain and the covenant

¹ Undoubtedly connoting originally "brother-in-law" rather than "father-in-law." The proofs of this statement will be presented in a volume to appear shortly, entitled *Semitic Rites of Taboo Pertaining to Birth and Kindred Occasions*.

should have been established. In these details the Elohist narrative agrees with the fragments of the older K and C documents, which are preserved in the Bible, so completely and exactly that we cannot but conclude that it must have borrowed directly from them with very little modification of the material thus borrowed. This undoubtedly justifies the inference that possibly some of the details of the Elohist narrative, parallels of which are lacking in the comparatively meager fragments of the K and C documents preserved in the Bible, were also narrated, perhaps in a slightly more primitive manner, in the original, complete forms of these two older documents.

The determination of this matter is obviously of great importance for the reconstruction of the history of the tribes of Israel in this early period of the exodus from Egypt and the desert wanderings. But it is so closely bound up with an analysis of the fragments of the K and C documents, referred to above, and a critical study of their contents that further consideration of this problem must necessarily be postponed until these other preliminary studies, and still others related to them, can first be made.¹

¹ By the term "K document" I mean Exod. 4:24-26; 33:1a, 12a, 14, 18, 20, 19a, 21-23; 34, 6aa, 8, 10aa, 14a, 17-22, 25-27; Num. 10:29-32, with, naturally, certain minor verbal emendations based chiefly upon LXX. In the article "Biblical Théophanies" (*loc. cit.*, pp. 171-93), already referred to a number of times in this paper, I have set forth the grounds for the isolation of these verses and the conclusion that they can belong to none of the main sources of the Hexateuch, J, E, D, or P, but must constitute a fragment of a document considerably older than any of these. Since the publication of that article, which was more of a preliminary study than aught else, further consideration has brought to light several significant facts that were then as yet unperceived, and has cleared up a number of matters that were then obscure, and a solution of which was offered only tentatively. I believe it is now possible to determine fairly exactly the general contents of the entire document, even of the portions that have been lost, and the date when, and the conditions under which, it was written; in other words, to affirm with quite as much positiveness and assurance as a similar affirmation can be made with regard to any other document of the Hexateuch except D, that this K document constituted the basis of the reform movement in the Southern Kingdom (I Kings 15:11-15; II Chron. 14:1-4; 15) in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa (II Chron. 15:10), i.e., in the year 899 B.C., and emanated from prophetic and pastoral circles in this kingdom, in which the Kenite, or the closely related Rekabite, clan or tribe must have played quite a considerable rôle. In its original form the K document must have told of the flight of Moses from Egypt, his marriage into the Kenite tribe, his return to Egypt at the command of Yahwe, the exodus of the children of Israel therefrom, their journey to the mountain of Yahwe, the solemnization there of the covenant between them and Yahwe, and their subsequent journey from the sacred mountain to the goal of their wanderings, promised to them by Yahwe. The greater part of this old document has, however, been suppressed by the J2 editors, who incorporated small portions of it into J, in favor of the later J version of the same incidents. In consequence only the comparatively few fragments of the K document cited above are preserved in the Bible. Careful study, however makes it clear that in most respects the narrative in the suppressed portions of K, although undoubtedly in many details more archaic in character, agreed with the present J and

E narratives, particularly the latter; or, perhaps more correctly, that the J and E narratives are based directly upon the narrative of the suppressed portions of the older K document.

At first I called this document, for obvious reasons, "The Little Book of the Covenant," and designated it by the label C2. But owing to the resultant confusion of both name and label with those of the Book of the Covenant proper, and the additional confusion that this document, labeled C2, was in fact considerably older than the Book of the Covenant, labeled C or C1, I have come to think it best to call this the Kenite document, for reasons easily perceived, and to label it K. (Perhaps Qenite and Q would have been scientifically more accurate, and would have been employed had not Wellhausen formerly used the letter Q to designate the Priestly Code; cf. his *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*.)

The original independence as a document of the Book of the Covenant and its later incorporation into E have long been recognized by biblical scholars. In the continuation of the aforementioned article on "Biblical Theophanies" (*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* XXVIII [1915], 15–25) I have set forth additional grounds for regarding Num. 10:33 as belonging to this document. Since the publication of that article further investigation has brought to light additional information about the literary history of the C document also. It is now clear that the original code of laws in C, upon the basis of which, according to the narrative there, the covenant between Yahwe and Israel was established, contained only those laws which are designated as *dēbarim*, as Exod. 24, 4 and 8 explicitly state. All the other laws now found in the C document were inserted later, and probably not all at one time. It is possible to distinguish between four different kinds of laws in the present C document, to classify them, and determine in a general way their origin and the order in which they were incorporated into the C code. Of the original C document only the following verses are preserved, Exod. 20:23–26 (expanded somewhat); 22:28–30; 23:10–19 (considerably emended and expanded); 24:4–8; Num. 10:33. The original document, however, it is clear from ample evidence, must have contained also quite an extensive narrative introduction and conclusion, paralleling in most details the narrative of the K document. The greater portion of this also was suppressed by the E2 editors, who incorporated merely these few fragments into E. The close relationship of C to K, and in fact its marked dependence upon K, both in the laws and in the narrative introduction and conclusion, make it very probable, if not practically certain, that the C document constituted the basis of the bloody revolution and reformation of Elisha and Jehu, supported by Jehonadab ben Rekab in the Northern Kingdom in the year 842 b.c. The participation of the Rekabites in this movement reveals the medium of transmission of the code of laws of the K document, the basis of the somewhat similar reformation in the Southern Kingdom fifty-seven years before, to the prophetic circles of the Northern Kingdom.

This summary statement will suffice to explain what is meant by the references to the K and C documents in this paper. Detailed discussion of all the conclusions here presented, and the manifold evidence thereof, must, however, be postponed for some other occasion.

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